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ABSTRACT

Videotapes have proven useful in studying children's early classroom writing experiences, capturing and preserving the contextual integrity of the writing situation in a way that would be nearly impossible to do in words. Because the tapes can be played over and over again, it is possible to extract meanings from the situation that might otherwise be missed. Tapes of this sort give the prospective teacher a chance to study and observe experiences that underlie and influence teaching practice before they actually set foot in the classroom. Experienced teachers, on the other hand, can use videotapes to see how strategies different from their own work in the classroom, and perhaps be inspired to try a new approach. Finally, videotapes can save time, showing research findings in action to teachers too busy to read the original research reports. The 20-minute videotape, "Beginning Writers," is a good example of what tape analysis of a classroom situation can accomplish. It follows two first grade students through six stages in a writing exercise: choosing and planning projects with help from the teacher, working on the projects, interacting with the teacher, writing about the projects, producing the final projects, and holding conferences with the teacher about the completed exercise. Each segment of the tape points out the writing research being illustrated and shows how it relates to two major themes of recent language and literacy learning research: the active construction of knowledge by children, including knowledge of reading and writing, and the supportive context of people and things that enables this construction. Such tapes foster an understanding of the general principles of language and literacy learning and help teachers to interpret children's behavior and provide for their needs. (Ordering information for the videotape described in this study is included with this document.) (RBW)

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USING VIDEOTAPES
FOR ILLUSTRATIONS OF WRITING RESEARCH FINDINGS

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Sometimes in a classroom, there is so much to look at, it is difficult to know what one is seeing. It can be particularly difficult to make connections between research and observations of the complex, sometimes confusing, always dynamic reality of actual classrooms.

Yet, goal is to educate teachers to be decisions-makers, rather than recipe-followers, it is critical these connections be made. Teachers need to be able to base their practice upon internalized understandings of how children learn, which they can use to interpret what they see and hear children do in school settings. "Teacher Knowledge" (Cazden, 1976) will guide their interpretations of children's behavior, and lead to planning which fits particular situations.

For example, teachers who have professional knowledge about children's early writing to guide their observations, can make appropriate decisions in this curricular area. How can they as students make sense of the variety of practice and behavior they encounter in classrooms they observe? How can they use the research they have studied to order these observations? And, conversely, how can their observations lead to a critical and lively second look at related research?

Videotapes in Teacher Education

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The use of videotapes is one way to help students link research and classroom practice, and ultimately to develop their theoretical framework. Videotapes may be called protocols in the B. Othaniel Smith concept (1969), that is, slices of life to reveal and focus upon specific concepts. The videotape "Beginning Writer" described below focuses on children's early classroom writing experiences. It will serve as an example of the ways in which videotapes may be used to help students understand overarching learning concepts and their application in specific learning situations.

Several advantages exist in using videotapes to study children's learning behavior. First, videotapes can do much to preserve the contextual integrity of the writing situation, while at the same time, limiting the students' view to one curricular consideration. Replaying the tape on different occasions for different purposes is always possible, in contrast to the impossibility of recapturing ephemeral first hand experience. Several viewers can act as a check against idiosyncratic interpretation by the original observer.

Second, videotapes carefully used in connection with both study and observation could balance and extend the other experiences which underlie and influence teaching practice, such as student teaching, classroom participation during a methods course, freshman early experience, and even

one's own early schooling. It is safe to say that in spite of the increased number and variety of field experiences required in many teacher education programs, there can never be enough. In particular, there never seems to be enough time to observe and participate in a limited, specialized way before full responsibility is imposed, first as a student teacher, and then as a teacher on one's own.

Next, and especially important to any program whose goal is to develop independent thinking, there is the need for images as a supplement to concrete experience, and as a counter-experience in many cases to the somewhat different images left from one's own educational experience. If, out of teacher education, a strong framework is established, one is less likely to slip back into powerful, earlier ways of home and school, using these familiar ways without conscious intent.

Finally, videotapes can help with the real problem of time. Students who are practicing teachers are often hard-pressed to read professional journals because of demands of daily classroom responsibilities. Current research reports which unfortunately appear removed from daily practice are even less likely to be read. Supervisors and teacher educators who use videotapes which reveal research findings in action help teachers connect significant relationships between research and their own classroom situation. Such an introduction may encourage

interest in reading some of the reports and summaries so pertinent to their teaching, and may encourage teachers to engage in their own observational research. In other words, while the protocol videotape is not enough in itself, if the educational leader follows through, it can make a unique contribution.

The Videotape "Beginning Writers"

This twenty minute videotape will be discussed sequentially. In each of its six segments the specific writing research illustrated will be pointed out. Some research will pertain to the psychological development of the individual, other to social, interactional aspects which support that development. These specific findings about young children's writing will be seen to contribute to two major themes which have emerged from research in language and literacy learning over the last few decades: the active construction of knowledge by children, including knowledge of reading and writing, and the supportive context of people and things which enables this individual construction. These themes will reappear in a final discussion of major understandings which this videotape can help build. While unnecessary for children, understandings of general principles of language and literacy learning, as well as knowledge of specific writing research enables teachers to interpret children's behavior and provide for children's needs.

Thus, both specific writing research and major themes are illustrated in this videotape. These beginning writers are constructing their own realities through gesture, through art, through spoken and written words. The children's independence and creativity are striking. Yet this creative behavior did not spring full-blown. Rather, it was nurtured in many visible and invisible ways, from the generous provision of materials and time, to the subtleties of the teacher's relationship to the children, a blend of secure leadership and trusting intimacy.

"Beginning Writers" is a videotape in color, focusing upon two children who had begun to write when they were in kindergarten, with no formal encouragement from their teacher. Cristi and Don had been in a combined kindergarten/first grade class, and upon seeing their older classmates writing they may have wished to enter the first graders' world of writing.

The tape takes place the following fall when each is a first grader. Since the noise factor in a busy kindergarten/first grade classroom is too high for recording individual voices, it was decided to create a classroom from two counseling rooms by opening the vinyl divider. The home room environment was approximated by making familiar pictures by the children on the walls, an organization of supplies they were accustomed to, plenty of space, a few pieces of typical furniture, and two peers. All this helped

to create a supportive context because of its familiarity to the children. Cristi and Don had known the two university people for over a year, since they had visited their class often and had even tried black and white videotaping themselves.

This is a teacher education film. Therefore, the camera's lens notes carefully the way in which the teacher, Kristen Kerstetter, works with the children as they progress through initial planning stages to their final conferences. Research pertaining to young writers is brought to life as the children actually perform in ways which the research predicts. This is explained in a brief introduction to the videotape, and illustrated by the six segments which follow, listed and described below:

1. Teacher Planning with the Group of Children
2. Don and Cristi Working on Their Projects
3. Teacher-Child Interaction
4. Children Begin to Write
5. The Final Products
6. Teacher Conferences

Introduction

1. Teacher Planning with the Group of Children

Cristi, Don and the other two children choose and plan their projects with Kristen their teacher, who helps each child, but in different ways. She asks Cristi, who is less articulate than Don, to anticipate materials she will need

for her project. She presses Don to name the dinosaurs he will draw and write about, knowing he has the background to do this. Thus, she is helping both children to verbalize and to be aware of their task. She is making open, explicit, and collaborative, the usually internal psychological process of incubation, that is, the catching and formulation of meaning (Britton, 1975; Graves, 1973, 1975; Moffett, 1968). She allows for this incubation phase because she has respect for the depths and complexities of the writing process, recognizing that this step is initial, before the pencil meets the paper, before the composition may be formed and the meaning further discovered through writing and drawing.

This segment can also be examined for the family quality of interpersonal relationships which Kristen has provided to support the writing process. She is physically close, she expects to find and meet individual differences, and she leads securely as does a parent, wanting to know what the children had planned, and letting them know the requirements. However, Kristin is also helping them practice new ways of relating to others, as she challenges them to take responsibility for choosing materials, and for developing their own content.

2. Don and Cristi Working on Their Projects

In this segment, we see Don, Cristi, and the other two children engaged in their projects. At the same time, they

use language and body language to relate to others, and to develop their own ideas. This segment thus illustrates the importance of providing a variety of means for children to use in processing and representing their experience in the classroom. Stories can be composed, that is, brought into being, ordered and shaped, through art, music, dramatic gesture, as well as through talk and writing. Graves (1973, 1975) has documented this kind of close and complex relationship between children's drawing and their talk and writing during a prewriting phase.

Don and Cristi share a set of paints. But whereas Don's project is a painting, Christi's is a collage which contains not only paint but also tissue paper and objects collected from a "nature walk" experience. The other children are making a Lionni-inspired book and stitchery picture. This variety is typical of their regular classroom.

A rich interplay exists between the talk of all the children and their actions in creating their projects. Talk is fully used. Don talks out his story with his peers as an audience, trying out ideas which are gradually transformed into a written register, appearing in the final text as "The man stuck a pin in its tail. Ouch!" He says with excitement, "You see, I'm going to make a man and he sticks a big pin in the dinosaur's tail. Ouch!" All four children talk together, as they comment on ideas, words, and on their

own processes. For example, Cristi asks Don, "Are you going to paint the dinosaurs black?"

Physical action is also very evident, serving dramatic and expressive intent. Don stands to talk, gesturing broadly with his arms, moving himself and his paintbrush to enact the dynamics of the dinosaur story.

Thus, Don can be seen to compose his story through clear, continuous, forceful verbalizations, through dramatic gesture, and through painting itself. Words, movement, and paint are integrated in a unified unselfconscious, creative absorption.

The demands of a solo writing experience have been lessened by continuation of other, old familiar ways - not only the availability of art, talk, and gesture, but also the provision of familiar experiences and familiar ways of relating to others.

Past experiences which constitute basic if largely invisible support for Don and Cristi's composing are also important. Parents and teachers have provided interesting activities with things, books, and people. Hence there is a history behind children's representations, so that when planning their work, they are drawing on multiple and varied experiences in the past. Dinosaurs have been encountered in pictures and in informational books, as mediated by parents and teacher. Cristi's "nature" collage reflects many experiences with real things and books, in the company of

others, especially a most recent class exploration of the fields behind the school. People have helped mediate the more abstract parts of this writing experience. Books, themselves symbolic abstractions, have become concrete tokens, thus lending psychological support. The dinosaur book Don keeps close by is clearly visible, although he does not refer to it during his work.

In summary, this segment showing Don and Cristi using art materials, talking, and gesturing, gives insight into the contextual balance the teacher has achieved. On the one hand, with the goals of schooling in mind, she has put them in a situation requiring solo composition, a new, more abstract activity. They are expected to select from their experience that which has personal meaning, and to embody it in images and spoken and written words of their own choosing--an individual, psychological activity. On the other hand, she has arranged a network of assistance by continuing familiar patterns within every aspect of the context. Content or subject matter experiences are as concrete and active as possible. Close interpersonal relationships are developed by provision of shared experiences. Thus a common history is created. The teacher's authority is tempered with intimacy. Finally, children have many different ways available to express and represent their meaning, and they have audiences for the

work at every stage, audiences who share their history and meaning.

3. Teacher-Child Interaction

In this segment, Kristen first admires Cristi's collage, and listens as Cristi names and explains what various parts means: "That's a little apple, fell off a tree." She then interacts with Don to help him develop and extend the oral language version of his story. She asks him again to name his dinosaurs, and thus to particularize and elaborate his information. She accepts his familiar language and content but presses him toward new, more explicit and developed levels of language and thought.

She also directs his attention to the word allosaurus, and asks him where he had learned it. He knows: "The Land of the Lost," his friend Matt, and his father. Thus, for the moment, Don shifts his focus from meaning to language itself. Such increased awareness of language is thought to lead to increased control over language, and hence over the ideas it represents (Olson, 1977).

A point about interpersonal relationships is also made by Kristin's expectation that Don's writing be done by lunchtime. She has used her power to set limits for him. She has also shared her power so that he has the experience of regulating his own time within these limits. In this way, she has modulated her familiar role as accepted authority with her new role as collaborator.

4. Children Begin to Write

The fourth segment will show the writing process, as Cristi and Don begin to write about their pictures. It is in this segment that psychological, individual processes are illuminated and many of the findings about children's construction of their own systems of language and writing are illustrated.

Children's insights into the nature of the English writing system, described as principles by Clay(1975), are revealed as the camera catches Cristi and Don in the act of writing. Clay's research has demonstrated how much young children have learned about written language, even without formal instruction. Students will be able to identify principles about print which these children have constructed, using using What Did I Write? (Clay, 1975) as a reference. Of these principles, the videotape clearly illustrates principles of sign, message, flexibility, directional behavior, segmentation of speech and writing into words, and page arrangement. Cristi and Don show intuitive knowledge of the sign and message principles, since they use words and letters to represent their message. Cristi is still experimenting with flexibility, orienting her "s"'s inconsistently. Both have internalized the directional behavior required by the conventions of English. Don but not Cristi demonstrates tacit understanding that speech is segmented by words which in writing are separated

by white spaces. Both arrange their writing on the page, coping with the problem of leftover text at the end of a line. Each composition could be evaluated using Clay's Rating Technique for Observing Early Progress in level of language, message quality, and directional principles (1975).

Graves' (1973, 1975) emphasis on the variety and complexity of children's writing behavior is seen in Don's mixture of talk, writing, spelling, reading and rereading, during this writing phase. He works out his spelling, displaying knowledge of sound/ letter correspondences: "f-i-t-i-n-g, fighting," and "f-i-e-r, fire". He is still trying out his wordings, which were developing as he retold this story to his teacher orally. He writes, rereads what he has written, writes some more. Writing for him is not straightforward, but recursive. As his teacher later commented, Don's rereading is important as he picks up sounds he missed first. She noted that he demonstrates intuitive knowledge of sounds and spelling rules as he writes, though he has had no formal phonics lessons.

Read's (1975) study of the systematic if unconventional way in which early writers spontaneously spell, is also represented in this videotape. In the case of both children, mouths move as words are lettered out. Both children are drawing on their own tacit phonetic knowledge to solve the problem of encoding their message. Both also

clearly reflect some knowledge of conventional sound/letter correspondences, as they create logical spellings such as Don's "kam" (came), "usd" (used), "klrse" (colors), and Cristi's "med" (made), "cins" (kinds) and "Nahr" (Nature, the "ch" sound represented by the lettername for "h").

Don and Cristi's writing processes can also be interpreted as meaning-making activity embedded inside complex social, three-dimensional "whole life" events (Harste, Burke, and Woodward, 1982). These children each have something to say, and draw on multiple channels in the process of representing their meaning. They are practicing the "orchestration" of the several systems which must be synchronized in order to convey their message. They must make what they write appropriate to the context (pragmatic system), and it must express their ideas (the semantic system), in a way which flows (the syntactic system), using words and letters to place hold their message (the graphophonic system). For Cristi at least, control of all these simultaneous activities is beyond her.

Yet the principle of negotiation applies, as she uses the unconventional graphic means of a continuous string of letters to stand for her message. Neither child is able to recapture in print the whole world three dimensionality of the experience lying behind his or her writing. One must also "read" their art work, their bodily and facial

expression, and listen to their talk to arrive at a feeling for the totality of their meaning.

Such research emphasized the dependence of individual creative activity on social support. Writing is neither just a linguistic nor just a psychological activity, but "psychosociological" (Harste, Burke, and Woodward, 1982). Every segment of this videotape gives evidence of the importance of interaction between teacher and children and among the children themselves. Even though these children are creating their own "written artifacts," this creative process is not an isolated psychological activity, but collaborative and social. Free talk among children and between children and teacher indicated a fostering of collaborative relationships. Talk was available as a way of relating to others, and of jointly working out or constructing meanings.

During this segment while the children are writing, the teacher is usually very much in the background. Although she is still available, her most active verbal participation has occurred earlier when children were planning and developing their projects. It will increase at the end, as teacher and children confer. However, her prior shaping of this writing event has enabled these children to write independently and happily. She has structured the event by creating a certain blend of familiarity and novelty. In particular, she has seen that there were familiar purposes

and audiences for writing, a new kind of activity for young children.

5. The Final Products

The fifth segment of the videotape lets the viewer examine the completed texts, as displayed with the children's art work. It also allows a focus on language beyond the sentence level, as connected discourse or text. What have these children been able to do in this new medium of writing, as they attempt to structure text? For in spite of the kinds of support available to children during the extended writing process, the core activity is solitary. Unlike conversation, which is constructed jointly with another, written text comes out of dialogue of writer with self (Moffett, 1968.) Further, this text must be constructed to stand alone as a coherent whole so that a reader can understand it without recourse to its environment (King and Rentel, 1981).

Students could analyze these two texts for what they reveal about Don and Cristi's tacit knowledge of written language. What do they know about weaving words together into a coherent, self-contained text, understandable to an outsider? What do they know about predictable structures, elements, and conventions of story (King and Rentel, 1981)? Finally, what do they know about using written language for diverse functions?

Don's dinosaur story would seem to fit Britton's (1970) poetic function since his prose is shaped, his text, a verbal artifact with a formal unity. Don's story is imaginative in its use of story language, and in Don's role as a spectator. On his second page, he has shifted to a more familiar, expressive function as he explains how he made his project: "I made my picture out of paint with many colors..." Cristi has been quieter throughout this writing event, saying little even when drawn out, revealing little of what will be composed. When the composition comes, it is purely expressive, again in Britton's terms, close to speech for oneself, in contrast to the shaped, imaginative language used by Don. According to their teacher, this matter-of-fact language is typical of Cristi's writings, whereas Don's writings show greater variety in function.

6. Teacher Conferences

As Kristen confers with each child, she first listens to descriptions of their work and then asks each to self evaluate by asking what they like the best about their endeavors. The final segment of each conference was to request an extension on the writing according to each child's developmental level. Her interaction throughout the conferences reveals an accepting attitude and deep interest in the child and his or her project. Yet Kristen emits an

air of expectation for the very best work each child can produce.

Don responds animatedly with great excitement about his project, saying that it is the best work he has even done. His teacher Kristen points out what she "likes" - his inclusion of all aspects of his oral story in the writing, spacing between words and use of the entire line for the writing. Since Don used no punctuation, she asks him to read the first sentence, obviously not a new topic to him, so he did not have to content with unfamiliar content. He starts reading, going past the sentence point but then rereads, stopping at the end of the first sentence. Kristen asks what punctuation is appropriate. Don responds quickly, "A period." His extension task is then to punctuate the rest of his text. He gets to work immediately, quite involved in the task which is within his capabilities yet makes him stretch his developing writing competence.

Cristi reads her composition readily to Kristen, stating that the sky was good in her picture because it had colors. She is then asked to tell everything that is good about her writing, even one good thing. Cristi says nothing, so Kristen goes directly to content, telling her that anyone who reads her story will understand why she made the picture and how it was accomplished. Next she points out Cristi's use of words clear across the paper in straight lines and the composition's neatness. These content and

form aspects were the focal points of Cristi's project; luckily her teacher recognized this. Assessing Cristi's writing competence, Kristen could see that the child had not yet fully developed the concept of a word. Therefore, Cristi's task was to underline each word she found in her text.

In conclusion, the purpose of this presentation has been to explain why videotaped classroom protocols are helpful teacher education tools. To demonstrate the usefulness of this instructional technique, a videotape developed by the presenters was discussed to illustrate how many concepts and research findings may be drawn from the viewing of the material. The description, although lengthy in some ways, was actually limited, for many wide-range teaching/learning concepts could be brought out beyond the realm of beginning to write.

Concepts of relevance to advanced study in education can be developed or are inherent in this videotape. For example, children beginning to write, illustrate children who are on the process of constructing both their social world and their language systems. They do this within a context shaped by adults who build on what is familiar and scaffold their efforts toward what is new (Cazden, 1979; Ratner and Bruner, 1977; and Vygotsky, 1978). Analysis of this context could be made in Halliday's (1974) terms of field, tenor and mode. The teacher shapes subject matter

experiences or field, interpersonal relationships or tenor, and the available means of representation and expression or mode. In this way she helps children move into new kinds of learning happily and successfully.

If you would try developing your own videotapes to meet your own teaching needs, through collaborating with local schools, or by using your own college facilities, the materials would be most useful to you. Then you would have a resource of special meaning to you and to your classes to use many times over. In this project you will have a far greater opportunity for success and the experience will prove to be most satisfying and profitable to your students. And, one can learn a great deal, sometimes in areas not expected such as the deleterious effects of a fly zooming around during the taping!

If you are interested in viewing "Beginning Writers," please contact:

Dr. Paul Peloquin
 OSU Teacher Education Laboratory
 021 Ramseyer Hall
 29 West Woodruff Avenue
 Columbus, Ohio 43210
 Phone: 614-422-5183

Purchase prices are as follows:

videotape 1/2" VHS T-30 bookshelf	\$8.68
shipping box	8.16

3/4"	30 minute new	16.00
	used	8.00

All prices include shipping cost.

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